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**‘White’, ‘Ethnic’ and ‘Indigenous’. Pre-service teachers reflect on
discourses of ethnicity in Australian culture.**

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Abstract

A cornerstone of my pedagogy as a teacher educator is to help students analyse how their culture and socialisation influence their role as teachers. In this paper, I share the reflections of my Australian students on their culture. As part of their coursework in a 4th Year B.Ed. elective subject, *Cultural Diversity and Education*, students reflect on and address questions of how they have been socialised to regard Anglo-Australian, Indigenous and non-British migrant cultures in their society. Some recall that their early conditioning cultivated a deep fear of Aborigines, and a tokenistic understanding of ethnicity. Others talk of their confusion between the pulls of assimilation into mainstream ‘whiteness’ and of maintaining a minority identity. This, combined with an often Anglocentric education, has left them with a problematic foundation with regard to becoming teachers who can overcome prejudice and discrimination in the classroom and the curriculum.

My paper argues that in grappling with the negative legacies of neo-colonialism and its ‘race’ ideologies, teachers need as a first step to analyse discourses of ethnicity and how these discourses construct ‘white’, ‘ethnic’ and Indigenous Australians. This groundwork is necessary for the further steps of honouring the central role of Indigenous people in Australian culture, recognizing how interacting cultures restructure each other, contributing to initiatives for peace and reconciliation, and promoting the study of cultural diversity in the curriculum – all essential components of an intercultural pedagogy.

Key Words

Cultures in Australia, discourses of ethnicity, teacher education, student narratives, Eurocentric learning, cultural socialisation, assimilation, postcolonialism, cultural diversity, multiculturalism.

Introduction

In this paper, I share the reflections of Australian pre-service student teachers on their culture. Student writing in autobiographical or biographical mode is analysed, with their permission, to reveal their reflections on their cultural location in Australia and what this means for them as future teachers. With its history of indigeneity, invasion, settlement and migration, Australia’s engagement with ethnicity demonstrates relations of power and inequality, conflict and consensus. Education constitutes a site of identity formation wherein these power relations are reflected and reproduced. It is important for student teachers to reflect on how these processes operate both in broad social context and in the current micro contexts of the schools for which they are being prepared. The extracts which I have selected from their writing reveal some of the Australian juxtapositions and contestations between discourses of ethnicity and their relationship to education.

However, from a postcolonial perspective, ethnicity and education in Australia suggest a story which resonates beyond this national context, since the entrenchment of the problems of racism and ethnocentrism is part of the global fallout of European colonialism. As a black teacher educator (one of very few in Australia), this is an understanding that I have developed over years of living and working in several countries of the former British Empire. Racism is so endemic that white-dominant ‘settler societies’ still have not come to terms with how to address the gross educational and other disadvantages suffered by Indigenous people and minorities ‘of colour’ in spite of the untold wealth of these nations, years of rhetoric, and expenditure that claimed to be tackling the problem (see Hickling-Hudson and Ahlquist,

2003). Nor have the formerly colonial powers of Europe overcome racism in their own countries and education systems. Many linguistically different ethnic minorities also suffer disadvantage even if they are 'white'. As Tsolidis (2001:14) points out, terms such as 'new Australians', 'migrants' or ethnics have been used to differentiate between Australians considered 'real' and 'non-real' – even in self-contradictory terms such as 'second and third generation migrant'. An ambivalent coexistence of outward-looking multiculturalism and Anglophile xenophobia leads some to regard Australia as having a successful multicultural society in which over 100 diverse ethnic/ linguistic groups live democratically together, and others to criticise it for its hostile treatment of some ethnic minority groups (see Smolizc 1997, Sheridan 2002, Hickling-Hudson 2003a). Discourses of who are the real and less-real Australians reflect and are constitutive of power relations dominated by British-derived cultural hegemony, still entrenched despite the growing diversity of the population, the increasing support for various levels of multiculturalism, and the articulation of multicultural aims by governments (1).

I ask my students to develop a conceptual framework for recognising the interconnected ideologies of ethnicity and oppression that may occur in the school setting, and for tackling ethnic discrimination in their teaching. This is by no means a straightforward task, since the inadequacy of historical, geographical or social education in the background of many teachers makes it difficult for them to conceptualise how they might research, write or teach interculturally (see Hickling-Hudson and McMeniman, 1996, Hickling-Hudson and Ahlquist, 2004, Levine-Rasky 2000). What one student vividly expressed in her essay is a concern voiced to me by many students after they return from weeks of teaching practice in schools:

“As a pre-service teacher I am confronted with students of all ethnicities, and because I have been socialized as a white Australian, I am ashamed to say I have no idea how to teach them”.

The students' assignment – a reflective cultural analysis.

In other articles, I have analysed the goals and strategies of a pedagogy of critical multiculturalism in teacher education (see Hickling-Hudson 1997, 2003a, 2003b, 2004), which aims to help students analyse how identities are moulded by culture and socialisation, and how they can construct an actively intercultural and anti-racist role as teachers. This paper draws on the work of some of my students to give voice to their introductory understanding of intercultural perspectives. Through life history analysis, the students paint a fascinating picture of the experience of ethnicity in Australia. This is done in one of the assignments that I set in a 12 credit point (36 hour) subject, *Cultural Diversity and Education*, that students may choose as an elective in the final year of their four year Bachelor of Education degree (2). Life history analysis gives embodiment to the policies and curriculum practices of multiculturalism. In their first assignment, worth 60% of the total grade, the students explore how people have experienced Australian culture in terms of ethnicity. They are asked to write either an autobiography or interview someone for a biography, exploring their experience in growing up in Australia or migrating to it, including how they have come to understand the place of Indigenous people in their society and schooling. This life history is to be analysed in the context of social definitions of culture and Australia's experience of ethnicity over the past two decades of tumultuous change. The second assignment, 40% of their marks, asks them to help a Principal of a hypothetical school design and re-structure, in collaboration with teachers and parents, school and classroom policies in manner that reflects the philosophy of critical multiculturalism.

It is selected results of the first assignment, the reflective cultural analysis, which will be shared in this paper. The best of these essays achieve an excellent balance between recounting their experiences of ethnicity (or those of their interviewee) and analysing these experiences with reference to the literature. They follow up the suggestions of the course materials about how to analyse their situation and role in Australian society. While limitations of time have led me to draw from only two classes and twenty eight students, I keep in mind my goal of

using in the future a much larger selection from the hundreds of student essays that have helped me to gain a unique insight into aspects of the cultural contexts and experiences of different ethnicities in Australia. In the style of grounded theory, the material that I have selected from the student essays has given rise to the themes or subheadings which I have used in this paper, themes which illustrate significant aspects of Australia's current history.

The students are asked to start by analysing the concept of 'culture' as it relates to social identity. They cite, comment on and synthesise readings to demonstrate the various elements of cultural identity – language, values, social relationships and customs. The aim of this exercise is for them to recognise that culture is a dynamic and constantly changing process by which individuals position and re-position themselves within a society. Students are asked to relate their analysis of culture to Australia's experience of ethnicity. The aim here is to get them to draw on the literature to articulate how immigration and concepts of ethnicity have dramatically defined the understanding of what 'Australian' means (Kalantzis, 2001). This literature helps students to see how varying conceptions of multiculturalism have over the past 35 years played a part in challenging and changing the Anglo-centred concept of culture in Australia. Policies such as the 1901 'Commonwealth Immigration Restriction Act' more commonly known as the 'White Australia Policy' enshrined the white Anglo-Australian ideal of what was Australian. Though it was abolished in 1973, it lives on in those segments of the national imagination which cling to the assimilatory idea that the intellectually 'superior' Anglo-Australian culture and lifestyle should absorb and displace all other cultures in Australian society. Tensions and contestations flow from this hegemonic role of the dominant culture (Singh 2000). On the one hand, Indigenous writer Aileen Moreton-Robinson points out the continuing central role of 'Whiteness' as an ideology:

'Whiteness in its contemporary form in Australia is culturally based. It controls institutions, which are extensions of White Australian culture and is governed by the values, beliefs, and assumptions of that culture and its history. Australian culture is less White than it used to be, but Whiteness forms the centre and is commonly referred to in public discourse as the 'mainstream' or 'middle ground' (Moreton-Robinson 1999, p. 28).

On the other hand, as one student put it:

"Aspects of the culture that is experienced in Australian society today are quite different to what was experienced in the 1970s and 80s. Globalisation, multiculturalism, immigration and world events have altered not only our understanding of ourselves as individuals, but as Australians".

A central question of ethical pedagogy is: what are the implications of these cultural currents for social justice in teaching?

Constructing multiple identities: whiteness vs diversity

In the literature on the ideology of whiteness, the argument is that the notion of 'whiteness' must be named and recognised as an overt and covert ideology, in order to disband its normalising practices which operate through all Australian economic, political and social systems, and specifically through the education system (Moreton-Robinson 1999, Singh 1997). Whiteness is shown to shape subjectivities as well as institutional and political practices within the white centre (Moreton-Robinson 1999). British dominance is still acting covertly in modern Australian society through the invisible and unnamed culture of 'whiteness', explained as the discourses of white supremacy. 'Whiteness is felt to be the human condition: it alone defines normality and fully inhabits it' (Dyer 1997:9, see also Tate, 2003). This is a new and unsettling idea for many students as they explore for the first time the contours of Anglo-Australian ethnicity. Some express the tension between the legacy of cultural diversity in their family history, and a feeling that the dominance of Anglo-Australian culture remains undisputed. This tension is brought out in the extracts below. Student 1 describes his early sense of comfortable superiority while wondering what 'Australian' means

given that his immediate family was British. Student 2, in spite of the assimilation of her German family, feels neither German nor Australian.

Student 1

'I have always considered myself Australian, as Australian as anyone can be, but what is Australian? In reality both my Grandmothers were born overseas, one in Scotland and one in Wales, and my Grandfathers' families both migrated from England in the nineteenth century, so I myself, born in Australia, am only a second generation Australian. I grew up on an isolated property one hundred kilometres from the nearest town which my Grandfather, on my mother's side, selected after World War 1. My early impression of my own identity was one of being a member of a good family who valued manners and work ethic. I felt very comfortable with who we were and our place in society and I probably did feel that comfortable air of superiority over other ethnic groups.'

Student 2

"I am the great-granddaughter of German immigrants. However; I had no access to my German heritage, as it was lost through assimilation. My family no longer spoke German at home because they were encouraged to be a part of the "Lucky Country" and speak Australian English. We no longer celebrated German traditions or spoke the language, and apart from religion and certain foods, the German culture that my Great-Grandparents had known and lived was all but lost. My family no longer recognised themselves as German-Australians but as Australians. Assimilation won. Our skin was 'white' and we now spoke Australian English therefore, my cousins, brothers and I grew up as members of the 'white community', members of a dominant group in a multicultural society. I can relate my history to that of other immigrants who through assimilation have lost their native culture. However, I can respect that my situation is different to the sense of loss Aboriginal people must feel from the effects of British invasion and colonisation. I cannot name myself a German-Australian as I do not belong to German culture, and would be called an Australian by Germans. However, I do not feel that Australian describes me accurately either."

A poststructuralist approach to discussing identity argues that individuals have not a single, fixed 'essence', but that they construct multiple identities in a process of refining and reworking values, beliefs and ways of seeing the world (Hall 1996a). This approach is explored by a few of the more sophisticated student analyses. For example, Student 3 said that, though identifying as Anglo-Australian, she felt that as an adult she was conscious of constructing her multiple identities in relation to different environments and contexts – environmental activist, dancer, teacher, neighbour. In contrast, as a child, she fitted into the strongly articulated framework of being Australian, feeling the 'rush' of this identity when slogans such as 'Hey true blue', 'Come on Aussie, come on', and 'Aussie kids are Weet-Bix kids' calling to her, as she expressed it, 'in a way I couldn't define. I was part of the urgent need to be Australian'.

The meaning of the term 'multicultural' as it was used at school and in the Bicentennial celebrations, was not evident to this student except that there were dances and foods from other cultures available for her consumption. She was not equipped to see and value the multicultural 'others' – the people in the periphery of the dominant culture – who were victims of institutional racism in which she was an unintentional participant. Reading for this essay confused her at first, since she felt that she did not in any way think or practise racism, yet the literature 'othered' her by excluding her from identifying with the experiences of ethnic and indigenous minorities. The concept of whiteness ideology alleviated her confusion, particularly when she came across the argument of G. Yancy in an article entitled 'Feminism and the subtext of whiteness' that "Whiteness assumes to think and speak for the entire

world....Despite postmodernist and deconstructionist emphasis on locating meaning within a system of differences, whiteness attempts to transcend differences....By constituting itself as centre, non-white voices are Othered, marginalised and rendered voiceless. Whiteness creates a binary relationship of self-other, subject-object, dominator-dominated, centre-margin, universal-particular" (Yancy 2000:157).

This discussion of the ideology of whiteness made it clear to her that being white involves privileged participation in the dominant culture, which furthers itself at the expense of other cultures. She observed that 'I only need to look at the world's political issues to understand how this is the case. The supremacy and hierarchy of white cultures is stamped over the world in many ways'. As an adult this student saw herself as having a social conscience, but until doing this assignment, she had never reflected on the privileges afforded her as a member of the white ethnic group. Citing an argument that the 'white guilt' of individuals is irrelevant to the struggles of ethnic minorities, she accepts that instead 'white responsibility' should be expressed by striving against institutional racism. 'For me, understanding my cultural background is a gift to renew my perspective on the world, and to exert myself in...contributing to the struggle for those who are in oppressed positions' (Student 3).

What's Australian? What's un-Australian? These were questions tackled by Student 4, who showed unusual political insight about the contradictory trends in claiming 'Australian-ness'. He cited how successive governments push the line about Australia's multicultural character, yet at the same time proclaim the 'Australian way of life' and the Australian identity in such a way as to promote homogeneity and exclude the multicultural dimension resulting from the existence of Indigenous Australians and the 24% of Australians born overseas (Jupp 2002). He felt that his own experience illustrated the contradiction. His service for seven years in the Australian Army Reserve bore out his strong commitment to Australia – as he observed, surely this kind of service 'warranted one to be referred to as Australian'? Yet, he says that he fell into the category of people accused by Prime Minister John Howard of being 'un-Australian' because they were involved in protests during the World Economic Forum in Melbourne on September 11, 2000. He reflected that the accusation was used by the government to enforce conformity, in an attempt to put pressure on people to submit to its narrow, conservative world view by branding them 'un-Australian'.

Curricular racism and the privileges of 'whiteness'

By reflecting on their schooling, students come to understand that the school curriculum perpetuates institutional racism when it trivialises or ignores cultures other than Anglocentric ones. Throughout most of the educational experience, the Anglocentric ethos has encouraged students to look outward, seeing ethnicity as belonging to groups other than themselves. Doing this essay has led them to conclude that it is vital for them as educators to do the opposite. That is, looking 'inwards' at their own ethnicity, formerly unrecognized, they come to understand not only that all groups, including white Australians, relate to an ethnicity, but also that particular ethnicities can carry privilege or disadvantage. They see why the Anglocentric devaluing and low expectations of other cultures marginalises Indigenous and non-Anglo children and why it is harmful that different knowledges are not applied as tools for thinking about and theorising the human condition (Moreton-Robinson 1999:31). This is a powerful way of understanding cultural and power relationships in the society.

Students remarked that their schooling provided an Anglo-Australian curriculum together with a host of discriminatory practices. The school curriculum treated the colourful and entertaining parts of 'ethnic' (that is, non-English speaking) and Aboriginal culture as suitable for 'multicultural' days, but ignored any other aspects of these cultures. It was no wonder, then, that school seemed easy and straightforward for 'Anglos', since the curriculum and testing instruments were geared to mainstream culture. The failure to provide equitably for other cultures led to ongoing disadvantage for them. Student 5 expressed it in this way:

“The Modern History and English curriculum which I was taught focused on aspects of white Australian and European history..... Until I left school, I did not know who or what ‘Mabo’ (3) was, or anything about the plight of women in countries such as India, Bangladesh or Afghanistan. The limited cultural experiences that I had in my school were through Japanese classes in which we made origami or ate sushi, or in Year 8 Modern History when we made boomerangs as part of our Australian History unit.”

This student cited the literature to observe that a curriculum like the one which she was offered, which many believe to be neutral and impartial, is often in reality taught from a masculinist, and culturally imperialistic perspective. She felt that another influence which powerfully helped to shape her ethnocentrism was the narrowness of the media, and cited the comment of Jacobowicz et al (1994) that the media continually articulates difference by assuming and reinforcing the boundaries and views of the world characteristic of the white, male, middle-class Anglo-Australian. She was also influenced by Rizvi’s point (1996, p.3) that the media presents issues about racism in a ‘highly indignant and sensationalist manner’ thus promoting the idea that racism in our society is confined only to a few sick individuals instead of trying to explain its widespread occurrence.

Student 6 observed that “the word ‘multicultural’ was in frequent use through my primary school years, yet it was a phenomenon which I don’t think I ever really understood. Instead multiculturalism was something I associated with SBS television (4).” This student said that throughout her schooling she socialised with a number of students from a variety of nationalities, yet all of them spoke mainly English. With hindsight, she realised that those who did not speak much English were rarely in the classroom, since they were required to spend most of their time in an E.S.L (English as a Second Language) group. She came to realise that while the idea of multiculturalism was supposedly celebrated in the school by way of ‘cultural days’, the student diversity that actually existed was ignored within the curriculum, which “persisted with a form of assimilation advocating an Anglo-Australian world perspective – basically my perspective”. The Anglo-Australian perception of history and world events was the only version of reality that was offered throughout her primary school years. In the classroom, she says, a white, western, middle class perception of the world was dispersed and assessed. These cultural values were taught not as alternatives, but as truths.

“In Australian history I learnt about ‘discovery’ rather than invasion, and ‘settlement’ rather than genocide. This can be seen as a form of racism against the Indigenous population, through omission of their perspectives. This method and vision of teaching continued on throughout my secondary schooling. At the time I did not see myself as advantaged, it was just normal. Malin’s research into indigenous students confirmed that indeed Anglo-Australian children were afforded a specific advantage, through educational systems which operated within Anglo-Australian culture (Malin, 1994). I agree with those researchers who argue against subscribing to one vision of Australian history, as a post-modern society needs to provide a multiple view of history to challenge the one-story view of all aspects of Australian history” (Student 6).

Student 7 analysed her primary school experiences as showing tension between the rejection of overt racism, and the perpetuation of everyday white privilege. She explains that in her primary school in the outback the students were sheltered from overt acts of racism: the school staff would not tolerate such behaviour. Yet ‘cultural and institutional forms of racism were allowed to continue unaffected, to the detriment of my fellow-students’. The school had a large Indigenous population, and celebrated Aboriginality in conventional ways such as by having students learn traditional songs and watch Aboriginal dancers performing at Assembly. The curriculum taught Italian but none of the Aboriginal languages, and covered no Aboriginal history. ‘It was as though certain forms of the Aboriginal culture, the colourful

and entertaining parts, were suitable for mass consumption, but we were to be denied educational access to the rest'. It was no wonder, she observed, that she 'spent years breezing through school without much effort at all because the curriculum and testing instruments were geared to my mainstream culture' while failing to provide for culturally different others, thus consigning them to a 'vicious cycle of disadvantage'.

This student's reflections led her to the view that whiteness could not be regarded as 'just another ethnicity'. Because of its hegemonic power, whiteness ideology saw 'ethnicity' as belonging to other groups outside of the privileged white norm. Socialised in this ideology, she never identified herself as having a culture, but unthinkingly accepted the graces that came from her middle-class location where education was valued, academic ability rewarded, and English spoken fluently.

"Every day, white privilege confronts us both personally and socially. When I was at school, I was Margaret, not 'the white girl'. We might hear news about the crimes of 'Lebanese Moslems', but not about the crimes of 'White Christians'. A label can speak a thousand words of condemnation, and the privilege of 'white' is the privilege of going unlabelled. By our acceptance of 'white' as a political and cultural marker, we reinforce the notion that white is power, dominance and normality, and non-white is marginal, submissive and sub-normal. The issue of white privilege is present in most facets of life, but its invisibility means that it is rarely addressed or corrected. Only a concerted effort on the part of educators, caregivers and society at large will make any difference to this mainstream view, but because it protects and privileges the dominant group in society, change is likely to be slow" (Student 7).

Some students reflected on how the school curriculum ignored or distorted the cultures of both Indigenous and migrant students, especially non-white migrants. At one high school, where there was a large population of Vietnamese students, the Vietnamese were rendered invisible in every facet of school life. At the same time, Australian culture was celebrated in a stereotypical way. "I recall the celebration of one particular Australia day at my high school being a damper-making, bush dancing, flag-waving extravaganza. I now look at these experiences and wonder what the large population of students with other ethnicities made of it all" (Student 8).

Learning prejudice

Racialization, observes Tsolidis (2001), involves a particularly virulent form of marginalization which often invokes physical appearance to reinforce it. "The concept of race has been used to externalize the Indigenous peoples of Australia and make them outsiders in their own country. This racism has framed Australian nationhood..." (Tsolidis 2001: 16). Racism shows in the negative and distorted representation of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, in their omission from many aspects of the national story, and in the way in which many white Australians (in an ironic inversion) have historically been taught to fear and hate blackness. These attitudes are reinforced by the fact that even now there is little social mixing between Indigenous and white. When there are friendships, they are often full of social tensions. All these trends are reflected in the essays of my student-teachers.

It is remarkable how many students over the years said that they had not had the experience of going to school with Indigenous students, or even of meeting them. One student had never seen an Aboriginal person until he had his first holiday outside of his home in Tasmania. Travelling to Queensland and the age of 12. "I distinctly remember feeling uneasy when walking past a group of Indigenous Australians, when they were doing nothing more than socialising". Reflecting on this feeling of uneasiness led him to trace it back to his childhood, when the media and schooling had always portrayed Indigenous people in a negative light. He realises that he learnt the attitude of uneasiness in the same way that people in the society learn to judge others on their skin colour and ethnicity (Student 9). The attitude of fear of blacks is so deep-rooted that apparently children learn it even when at the same time they

have friendships with Indigenous peers. One student recalls that as a young child growing up in north Queensland (Innisfail) in the 1980s, she was brought up to believe that Indigenous people were cannibals – dirty, primitive, frightening people. “If we hit a ball into our Indigenous neighbour’s yard, that was where it stayed. Nobody was brave enough to venture into the yard, lest we be killed and eaten.” She now understands these tales as having been constructed to keep the segregation lines firm (Student 10). In spite of this, she made friends when starting Primary school with an Aboriginal girl (with whom she is still friendly today). She did not perceive any difference in her friend, but did perceive other Aborigines to be different and frightening.

“There were many Aboriginal people who lived in my hometown. My first recollection of the Aboriginal community was seeing the people at the ‘blacks’ pub and very few white people ever went into that particular pub. As a child I would walk across the street to the other side of the pub so I would not have to walk past it, as I was scared I might be chased or attacked by an Aborigine. I do not recall my parents ever telling me to do this, however I must have been socialised to believe that the Aboriginal people were all drunkards and potentially harmful to ‘whites’ (Student 9).

Looking back, she puzzles over when she realised that her friend was Aboriginal. She remembers assuming that light-skinned Aborigines, like her friend and others in her class, were not ‘real’ Aborigines, as their skin was not as black as other Aboriginal people she saw in town. She remembers the teachers referring to her Aboriginal school-mates as ‘half-caste’, discrediting and denying their Aboriginality. Lessons that she ‘did’ in Year Seven on Australian Aborigines perpetuated the usual stereotypes of Indigenous Australians:

“We learnt about the hunter-gatherer lifestyle, tools weapons and shelter. There was no reference, let alone any discussion in relation to British invasion and colonisation.... I remember thinking that all my Aboriginal school friends were not ‘real Aborigines’ as they did not live or look like what we had learnt about in Social Studies” (Student 10).

Another student who enjoyed a wide range of friendships at high school with Indigenous and migrant students learnt what it was to be abused because of her association with ‘them’. Because she had an Indigenous boyfriend, other white boys of her age would call her ‘white slut, white whore and red munga’, while her Aboriginal boyfriend was referred to by his cousins as a ‘coconut – black on the outside but white on the inside’. She observes that many of her schoolmates endured racial abuse – “it was part of life that you learnt to deal with. But I had no idea what was causing the anger behind it” (Student 11). This student reflected that her experiences had given her a good understanding of individual racism, but that she had never heard of or thought about institutional racism, and had ‘absolutely no idea that I had a distinct advantage over these minority groups because of my ethnicity’.

An unusual story came from Student 12 who puzzled for years over the prejudice that she experienced as a child at school.

“Despite the fact that I was a sixth generation Australian, I was subjected to prejudiced taunts at school based on certain aspects of my appearance....I remember the repeated demands by my peers to recite the phrase ‘the quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog’. They were adamant that I must have an accent because ‘I did not look Australian’. I remember now, with amused hindsight, asking my mother whether I looked like a turkey after being told by other children that I resembled a ‘Turk’. I remember, most of all, the hurt of being told I was a liar whenever I declared my Australian ancestry. Although I could not put a label on it at the time, I now know that what I was subjected to was prejudice as described by Partington and McCudden (1993:186-7). I was labelled and accused of being something I was not, based on superficial visual difference alone. Indeed, this has continued throughout my life....I am always being asked where I am from, where I was born, where my parents are from and so forth....”

This student wrote that it was only recently that she came to understand why her appearance has – ironically – been so consistently considered ‘un-Australian’. It was because she had inherited a somewhat Aboriginal appearance from her great-grandmother.

“My great-grandmother was adopted shortly after her birth in 1895.... Upon her death, her children, including my grandmother, burnt her birth certificate in shame. Whatever had caused the shame would not be revealed for many years. My mother and the other grandchildren often suspected their Aboriginal heritage. However, requests for the ‘truth’ were always denied... until it was finally revealed that my great-grandmother was, in fact, Aboriginal. A considerable part of my heritage has been concealed from me for many years, due undoubtedly to my family’s fear of racism.” (Student 12).

The insights of this student into the complexities of race in Australia were poignant. Her ‘Australianness’ was never questioned by friends at high school who were recent immigrants from many countries, but it was doubted “by people who could not trace their Australian ancestry as far back as I”. However, she is not regarded as Aboriginal by most people, and does not describe herself as Aboriginal “primarily because I fear that, once again, I will not be accepted as such by other people.” The reflections of Wendy Holland (1996), who describes herself as light-skinned, Australian and Aboriginal, helped Student 12 to work through her confusion.

“Like Holland (1996), I too felt embarrassed and confused by the complexities and contradictions in naming my identities. However I now realise, as suggested by Holland, that the experience of ethnicity goes far beyond external appearances and that no one experience of being ‘Australian’ or ‘Aboriginal’ is more real or superior to another. Like Holland...I feel that...I assume different identities, in different contexts, at different times....”

What changes prejudice?

The steps by which people unlearn race prejudice are rarely cited in the literature. It was interesting to see that several students reflected on this process in their lives. For example, Student 11, cited above, sees her tertiary education as having been most rewarding in changing the heretofore unexamined assumptions shaping her culture and identity:

“University has taught me to question that with which I am most familiar, and view the institutions and practices in society from another’s perspective. It has taught me the importance of recognising, understanding and teaching for diversity. And, it has allowed me to understand the frustrations that may have caused, and are probably still causing discrimination in schools. Thus, I am able to say that I am more culturally aware, not only of myself, but also of others”.

Student 13 recalls a family background which taught him the ability to challenge prejudice. He paid tribute to the influence of his grandmother, who often explained to him how Aborigines were being disadvantaged by government policy, and who taught him to deal with ethnic minority groups in a respectful way – to “listen to what they have to say, be polite and do not listen to hearsay”. He was also taught by his family that many migrants “had lived through the Second World War under more adversity than I would probably see in my lifetime – so listen to them as you will often learn something”. This home teaching was reinforced by a particular schoolteacher who taught his class that a number of the British expeditions to open up Australia would probably have been unsuccessful ‘if it were not for the tenacity and courage of the black trackers who held guide the predominantly white expeditions’. He vividly remembers the story told in school lessons of an Aboriginal tracker who looked after the explorer Kennedy after he had been speared and then continued the journey to the outpost in order to alert the officials as to what had happened. As an adult, he worked closely with Aborigines and migrants on labouring jobs and as an ambulance officer.

He observed their commitment to working to improve the life-styles of their families, and was able to help improve work conditions for them and break down some of the cultural barriers in production areas. In discussions with people from these cultural backgrounds, he found that “they often refer to the difficulties and bias that they faced when at school and when joining the work force. However, over the years they have adopted the philosophy of not dwelling on these past tribulations but preferring to look to the future”.

Student 14, who was born and educated in England and migrated to Australia as a young woman, was insightful about the steps by which she challenged the ethnocentric knowledge into which she had been socialised. She recalled that her middle-class English background was steeped in certainties about the historical ‘superiority’ of British imperialism, recalling that her schooling, with its very academic curriculum and Christian faith, never acknowledged any culture that was not British. “My response to it at the time was mildly antagonistic, reflecting a desire to escape such formality and superficial eliteness into the romanticism of fascination with other cultures...” As a teenager she read on her own about Arab cultures, and after leaving school, she read about the North American Indians ‘and discovered what my own people had done in history to acquire American land’. However, it was her experience of being ‘othered’ in Australia, and then listening closely to Aboriginal activists, that put her on the path of changing her beliefs

Though she migrated to Australia at the age of 22, she wrote that she was able for some years to keep her British middle-class culture intact, as the differences she encountered at first were only superficial ones. Her cultural identity received its first challenge when she went to work in the shearing industry:

That was a real culture shock, from one Anglo culture to another. First, I was one of three women in a historically male domain, and I was middle-class and the men were not. I felt isolated and treated as ‘other’ in a world that I could barely understand, as I had no idea what they were talking about. Being middle-class and female was a threat to the white male power. I had been under the impression that Australia had no class distinctions, but it did not take me long to discover that this was a fairy story as Eckermann (1994, p. 9) has found.

It was developing links of friendship with Aboriginal people in rural New South Wales that started to change the ethnocentrism of her cultural identity. She witnessed ‘in the raw, the way in which white dominance controlled the community and constructed racism into normal daily life’. She saw how as a result the Aboriginal people experienced ‘fear, terrible health and appalling housing’. She witnessed how whites showed daily that they despised Aborigines, and particularly remembers one white farmer who openly expressed his view that ‘if the white population worked hard enough to make life difficult, the Aboriginal people would leave the area permanently’. What she described as this man’s ‘unspeakable racism’ stemmed from the fact that he saw Aboriginal people as having no value to the area, and as pulling the district down. Some Aborigines appeared to have been absorbed into the patterns set for them by the dominant culture, in that they seem to have given up the hope of attaining any sort of equality. However, others understood and resisted the ways of the dominant culture. It was these Indigenous cultural activists who taught her about Aboriginal culture.

I was privileged to have many conversations with these people who have a heart to their culture, and a warmth that they share regardless of who one happens to be. I marched with them in Aboriginal week, listened to their stories and worked with their leaders over a concern that spread across the community, about the Narran Lakes. This land was precious to them, but it was also valuable to the local farmers who used it, and as an environmentalist it was valuable to the likes of me. A wealthy cotton farmer in Dirrannbandi wanted to take more water. Collectively we succeeded for a while, but the barriers of racism were ever strong and that reduced everyone’s effectiveness.

This student reflects that through striving together with Aboriginal people for change

I really found out about the truth of Aboriginal people and learned about myself in the process. I learned about Australia's real history and another culture that had much closer ties to the land than mine. It was through recognising difference and discovering commonalities that I realised a personal cultural identity of myself.

For Student 15, changing the prejudiced attitudes she had learnt at school and in the society came through dissonance between the reading that she was doing for this subject and the attitudes showed during a social occasion with a group of friends. She explains that reading Kalantzis (2001:11-24) made her question her assumption that the harsh treatment of Aboriginal people was so firmly rooted in the past that

it was not something that my generation needed to worry about. Kalantzis' comparison with the genocide of the Jews in Germany has caused me to re-consider the truth of my version of Australian history as I know it. Just as I think it is extremely important that no one ever forgets what Hitler did in Germany, it has become evident that Australia's history of trying to wipe out Australia's Indigenous people should also never be forgotten or allowed to ever happen again. Lunching with a bunch of ladies at an exclusive golf club recently, the topic of conversation drifted to the way history is now taught in schools. Each of the lunching ladies has children in grade four. One of the ladies migrated with her family to Australia from Germany four years ago. My German-born friend commented on how history taught at school in Germany was graphic and depicted the atrocities against the Jews as something that should never happen again. When I mentioned the comparison Kalantzis made about our past treatment of Indigenous people, I was shocked by the replies from my white Australian friends which ranged from complete denial to 'let's just forget about it'. Sleeter (2004) suggests this resistance is a common occurrence when white people are taught about racism. I was astounded that my German friend was the only one of my friends to see things from the perspective I was trying to put forward.

An Aboriginal voice: resisting prejudice

Since Indigenous students usually take the elective entitled *Issues in Indigenous Education* elective rather than the *Cultural Diversity* one, Indigenous voices tend to appear indirectly in these student essays, through the work of students who select to do biographies. One student interviewed a young Indigenous woman in her twenties who had contradictory feelings about her schooling. She did not feel stereotyped or pressured by the school or teachers to behave in a certain way, yet she did experience some racism from peers. This took a verbal form in what she described as "normal prejudiced stuff, name calling, like 'black this' and 'black that'" (Student 16). It was noticeable, here, that racism was regarded as 'normal stuff'. The interviewee recalls feeling as a child that it was no use approaching teachers to ask them to intervene to stop it 'because the teachers were white and she didn't see it as a possible solution or strategy'. This interviewee felt that the school, her teachers and peers acknowledged her culture, saying that recognition from the school was evident through displays of artefacts, paintings and guest speakers. Yet she also felt a conflict in priorities between home and school when it came to Aboriginal studies:

It did affect me. When you're in Grade three or four you look at your teachers and think that they know everything, that they're never wrong. Then when you go home you're told different things by your parents and it's hard to know who or what to believe, but of course I believed my parents before anyone else. I remember doing an assignment in Primary school and taking a book home and showing Mum and Dad. Dad said 'What are you doing?' I said 'I'm doing an assignment on Aborigines and our culture'. He got angry. 'You don't get it out of this book, that's all rubbish, it's all lies'. 'But the teacher said...' 'I don't care what the teacher said, you don't get things out of this book. You've got to go and listen to your elders, and listen to our stories that we tell you, that's the truth!'

The same interviewee acknowledges the advance over the last ten years in the degree of recognition that Australian social policy has given to indigenous people. She sees the difference in the type of schooling now offered to her younger sisters.

Even though there was some recognition when I went to High School, for example through ASSPA (Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness program) meetings and funding for excursions, I look at what my sister is doing now at her school and what they are doing with our culture and I wish I could be doing it as well. It's great. Yes, there is a lot more awareness in society on the importance of recognising Aboriginal culture.

'Ethnic' cultures – consumed, yet resented

Prejudice was directed not only at Aborigines, but apparently, at all non-Anglo groups. An 'ethnic' person means, in the Australian vernacular, one who is not of Indigenous or Anglo-Australian background. Ethnicity might be Asian, African, Latin-American, Pacific, Caribbean or non-British European. An 'ethnic' is regarded as the 'Other' who is different from the Anglo norm in colour, race, and/or language. The culture of Anglo groups (white British, white North American, white New Zealander or Anglo-Australian) is taken for granted as the invisible norm against which 'Others' with their exotic cultures are understood. Ethnic difference is a source of both pleasure and repulsion, as these student extracts suggest. There is pressure on ethnics to assimilate and be grateful to Australia for 'taking them in', as Student 17 recalls:

"Non-Australian people were the ones who did things differently, communicated in a different way and had different values. For example, Greeks or Italians invariably owned the 'fish'n chip' shops... At school, the 'different' ones had funny names that nobody could pronounce properly, and if one was able to meet their parents, they spoke with heavy accents and were difficult to understand....a Dutch family called Hamerslag attracted so much 'Aussie' criticism that they sadly deformed their family name to Hamer...The German-Australian children were not allowed to play with us on Saturday because they had to go to 'German School'. I remember being particularly annoyed about this. I did not realise that 'migrants cling to what is small and beautiful... their culture, their dialect, their self-respect, their selves' (Wilton and Bosworth, 1984). I did not think this was necessary or important. Being part of the dominant group, I was upholding the idea that cultural difference necessitates competition and therefore hostility (Jacubowicz et al, 1994). It did not occur to us that the children were going to German schools in an effort to facilitate ongoing conceptual development and provide themselves with 'greater opportunities to realize their intellectual potential' (Kalantzis and Cope, 1984). We just thought they were being rude and ungrateful to the country that had taken them in" (Student 17).

This student recalls the names hurled at migrants – 'wogs', 'dagos' and 'slopes'. She remembers feeling very embarrassed by it, but also that she lacked the courage to reprimand her friends for this abuse.

Student 18 made the point that while he and his peers enjoyed their consumption of the exotic food and entertainment that ethnic minority migrants brought to Australia, this co-existed with animosity towards them. He amusingly expresses it in this way:

"My cultural and social exploration of the many varied minority cultures present within Australian society consisted of eating pizza and watching *The Godfather* (and thinking it was an Italian experience), dining at ethnic restaurants (thinking that this was all there was to a multicultural experience) and attending the Greek festival at West End (another multicultural experience but where I generally hung out by the beer tents, a very Anglo-Australian cultural experience).

Inherent in my attitudes and those of my friends was a belief that our cultural ethnicity was not only dominant but superior to other ethnic minorities within our culture. It was ok to eat at their restaurants and attend their festivals but don't be seen

hanging out with them in their clubs, bars, coffees shops etc. We had the attitude similar to the one stated in Reading 6: that us 'Aussies learn different cultures and foods while wogs get a job, a car, a house and another Aussie is out on the street' (Tsolodis, 1986, p. 60). This attitude is a combination of ethnic and race discrimination (Jacubowicz et al, 1994, p. 29)."

This student reflected that these racist attitudes are absorbed as part of a normal educational experience of the dominant mainstream Anglo-Australian person because racism is 'structurally built into every aspect of Australian social life' (Rizvi 1996, p. 7). His subsequent visit to Spain for 18 months and the Netherlands for another 18 months immediately gave him the experience of feeling 'like those wogs in my primary school classes' (Student 18). His socialization and learning of the languages in these cultures and his experience of living as an ethnic minority were beneficial in two ways. First, he was able to adopt a new and varied cultural identity that 'augmented my own Anglo-Australian cultural identity for the better', and second, he 'developed an intercultural understanding for Australia's multicultural society, especially for the many varied ethnic minorities within'.

Negotiating two cultures: suppression, confusion and reclaiming identity.

Students from ethnic minority groups, reflecting on their experiences as migrants to Australia, struggled to get used to the strangeness of learning to become hyphenated in the sense of practising dual cultures such as 'Vietnamese-Australian' or 'Indian-Australian'. In general, these students experienced severe culture shock, a feeling of dislocation and isolation on arrival, and the complexities of being socialised into two cultures. The reflections of these students, as well as those told by students of mixed heritage, told of the challenge of operating in two cultures, often experiencing racism in both, in being wracked by doubts and fears about 'belonging', in coping with contradictions, conflicts and shame as well as the comfort of identifying with a strong ethnic community framework, new friendships, assistance received in settling down, and the opportunities and interest of a bi-cultural life. The importance of retaining their home language was a central part of the stories of all of the new migrants. One who grew up in the 1980s found that the new services in multilingual education and broadcasting were of immense help to his family, as they were migrants who came from a non English-speaking background. However, school was very hard for him since his parents could not help him with homework or schoolwork, and since he was adversely affected by the ethnocentrism of the curriculum (Student 19).

A student from Papua New Guinea reflected that the culture of his childhood in PNG was vastly different from the culture he met later in Australian schools. Since his Australian school peers laughed at him for talking in his mother tongue, he soon learnt to keep his distance from them and spend most of his time after school with his family:

To say nothing was the best policy thus during class times my input was minimal and was only given when prompted by the teachers....Due to the way I was treated by other children and adults, I soon learned that it was best for me to forget my past culture and to learn to fit into the new culture....I did not mention where I was born....This new culture directed new cultural boundaries. My language changed, my customs changed, my morals and values were challenged and my peers changed. Throughout this whole process I was constantly seeking out others who were in a similar situation to me. (Student 20).

He recalls that in school the curriculum was constructed in such a way that there was little mention of other cultures, and when there was, "it was viewed as 'us' (whites) looking down at 'them' ". It was not until this student was an adult that three patterns of cultural oppression became clear. One was how his schooling had taught him not to challenge anything in the curriculum, even when it was untrue and derogatory to his context, but to take it as the 'truth'. The second was his realisation that his situation as one of a culturally suppressed minority was also true of Indigenous communities. This realisation occurred when he moved to an

Aboriginal community in North Queensland to teach, and there was able to make close friendships with Indigenous as well as New Guinean families and re-learn the language and customs of Papua New Guinea. Among these communities, he realised that he shared with Indigenous people the struggle to retain identity and culture, shocked to learn how they had been treated by white Australian society. The third pattern of cultural oppression that he recognised in North Queensland was the lack of cultural preparation of first year teachers sent to indigenous communities to teach. He observed that Wendy Holland's comments were relevant to this situation:

'What was of real concern to me was that these students were in training to be teachers and that one day they would be out in schools teaching. It was frightening to think what some of them might be like in a classroom where there were Aboriginal kids, or kids from other culturally different backgrounds....' (Holland 1996: 95).

He recommended that the teachers' lack of preparation be addressed by specific in-service development and 'peer tutoring which relates directly to the cultural environment they are living and working in', as well as by more consultation with community members and a higher level of indigenous input into the school.

A student of Filipina background reflected on many elements of experience in Australia that had utterly confused her since she came as a young child. She recalls that when she was just starting school, in Grade 1, an Australian friend came over to her house to play:

but when my mum answered the door the mother of my friend would not let her play with me any more. When my mum explained to me that the other child's mother did not like her because she was Asian I didn't understand... I still don't understand why there is so much racism and hostility between people. After all that is all we are – people" (Student 21).

She was confused about her class background. Her family, regarded as a comfortably-off, small-farming rural family in the Philippines, was seen as working-class in Australia although her father owned a small business and the family had two cars and a house that was nearly paid off – which would have put them amongst the 'wealthy city families' in the Philippines.

Labelled as an 'Asian-Australian', she was constantly faced with the assumption that she would excel at Maths and Science, and was advised by her school counsellor to take these subjects to a high level in senior school, yet she hated these subjects and excelled, instead, at the Arts including the violin. In Year 10, a classmate wanted to copy her Maths answers and when she told him that she was having difficulties with the Maths problems, he taunted her with being "a useless half-caste Asian if I could not even beat an Australian kid at a simple set of maths questions". For years, this comment affected her deeply; she had thought that her schoolmates had not really seen her as an Asian as she had 'white skin like my dad'. Yet, she loved being part of a strong Filipino community in a rural Australian town. It was like being part of an extended family. She recalls being punished by 'being grounded for two weeks, losing absolutely all privileges' after she had disagreed with a Filipina adult and called her by her first name instead of addressing her respectfully as 'Aunty'. "I think that is why Asian communities are so strong. There is a framework for the community, and as long as you grow up within the framework you know that the community is based on respect" (Student 21).

Australians of 'mixed' heritage: learning to be hybrid.

'Mixed' heritage as used in these essays usually referred to the offspring of parents of different nationalities and ethnicities. Like the new migrants, they too had to learn how to be bi-cultural and sometimes experienced racism from both cultures. Student 22 had a Japanese mother and an Australian father. She recounted what a severe blow it was on the side of her Japanese family that their daughter was marrying a foreigner. Her grandfather actually attempted suicide because of his demoralisation, though luckily he did not succeed, and he eventually accepted his daughter's marriage. This student explains her grandfather's initially

extreme ethnocentricity as having been shaped by World Wars 1 and 2 and ‘concreted in Japan’s traditional past’. As a child in Japan, she remembers a terrifying incident of other children teasing her, chasing her and even pelting her with stones until she reached home. She explains that this kind of victimisation occurred because of her visible characteristics which differed from the norm – big round eyes and brown hair colour. When she moved to Australia at the age of seven, she was also frightened and alienated by her experiences at school there. “No matter how hard I tried, I always considered myself as different or alien.” Her struggles with identity ranged from identifying herself as Japanese, yet at the same time feeling isolated and not belonging to any group. By the time she reached high school, however, she became ‘very much assimilated into an Australian student group... the way my friends lived, how they thought and perceived things were the same as mine.’ With her increasing feeling of being accepted by Australia came a weakening of her feelings towards Japan. Yet a contradiction remained: ‘strangely at the bottom of my heart I still felt attached to Japan’.

This student pondered on the value of an activity given to her Diploma of Education class at another Australian university. The class was required to match stereotypes with nationalities and then discuss this. A white Australian in the group, who had lived in Japan for five years, refused to participate because of his view that such an activity promoted racism. She felt that this was paranoid, and that such an attitude, instead of promoting cross-cultural understanding, made certain topics taboo and unable to be discussed.

Student 23, also exploring her ‘mixed heritage’, recounted that her Hungarian mother migrated to Australia after the Second World War and married her Australian father. The experiences of her mother in rural Australia illustrated the difficulties of being marginalised and regarded as ‘different’. She was dislocated from her Hungarian heritage and experienced a loss of identity because of her strivings to assimilate “as quickly and as painlessly as possible, to avoid the taunts of ‘crow eyes’ and ‘gypo’”. Her mother’s cultural dislocation

“caused a rift between herself and her parents, who fought hard to maintain their culture and identity. As a child I was aware of this struggle between my grandparents and my mother, and was fascinated by the fact that I had a mixed heritage, although the traditions of Hungarian culture, the language and customs were never shared with me. For my mother it was a source of shame, as this was intensified by the Menzian ‘Britishness’ of my father’s parents, who condescended to allow her into the family.”

According to this student, growing up in a small town in rural NSW with a mixed heritage “gave my six siblings and myself a taint of the exotic”. She points out that ethnic communities tend to be concentrated in the larger Australian cities, and that this geographic pattern is a factor that influences attitudes towards ethnicity, race and culture in Australia. “Although not excluded from rural communities, ethnic groups are under-represented in these areas, and this has tended to give rise to the ‘Hansonism’ that placed race and immigration as a central issue in the Federal elections of 1996 (Burnett 1999).” In the late 1970s the family, influenced by their Catholic priest, decided to sponsor a Vietnamese refugee family, and immediately set about “the operation of assimilation, trying to teach these disenfranchised, isolated and frightened newcomers how to become Australian”. When the Vietnamese family, desperately seeking contact with the other families who had braved the sea journey with them, decided to move to the suburb of Cabramatta in Sydney, it was a tremendous blow to her parents who had failed to convert them either to Catholicism or to the benefits of assimilating ‘into a wholesome rural life’. This student reflected on her family’s assumption that the dominant culture should prevail. She analysed this attitude, pervasive throughout Australia, as being patronising, in line with social Darwinism, and as resulting in the draconian assumption and policy that assimilation was the only option for indigenous people and migrants. She concludes that it was her post-school education and experience that allows her “to examine the underlying hegemonies of Australia’s white, patriarchal orientations and understand the importance of questioning inherited perspectives”.

Australian Identity Overseas.

Overseas travel stimulated reflections on what it meant to be Australian. When students travelled abroad, they found that the image and perceptions of Australianness are inevitably superficial and distorted. For example, people expect Australians to have an accent that is supposed to match those in the film ‘Crocodile Dundee’, to utter phrases like ‘G’day mate’, and to be immersed in beer drinking and surfing. It comes as a great shock to these first time Aussie travellers to find that they themselves can be made the butt of stereotypes. As one student expressed it, “The first time I was ever shocked by stereotypes was when they were applied to me!”

Living as Australians overseas in culturally very different societies such as Tanzania, Uganda, Papua New Guinea, Japan and Vietnam irrevocably changed the beliefs and lives of some students. Their culture and ‘whiteness’ immediately became visible and questioned, rather than invisible and taken for granted, and they learnt what it was like to be treated as ‘the Other’. Becoming the victims of racist jokes, staring, exclusion from popular friendship groups, or being the recipients of an embarrassing preferential treatment because of their white skin was even more traumatic than encountering casual stereotypes while travelling. Some of these students learnt the truth of the observation that the victims of discrimination often will not complain: they felt silenced by their experience. Others learnt that qualities they had been socialised to admire, such as being confident and outspoken, were not admired in the host country.

Some students looked back at their childhood experiences and reflected on how they constituted a part of colonialism. The situation of their families as part of a privileged white minority enjoying the benefits of colonial exploitation included being surrounded by black servants from the black majority. For example, one student related that as a child in Papua New Guinea, her family always had a house ‘boy’ (a married man with three children) who did the laundry and the ironing, vacuumed, dusted, made beds and washed dishes – ‘at night time we simply rang a little bell to let him know that it was time for him to clean up after our dinner’ (Student 24). Yet she remembers her parents as going out of their way to be friendly and to treat Papua New Guinean people as equals. Her father, with all the travelling his job entailed, spent a lot of time with them and was often very reliant on their help and accommodation, particularly in the more remote locations of New Britain and the Highlands. However, whatever may have been the attitudes of some individuals, colonial society was structured in a sharp racial hierarchy. She remembers that natives worked in a variety of other fields, for example as police and army recruits, factory hands, and cab and bus drivers, receiving training in some aspects of white culture ‘so that Papua New Guinea could be developed into a thriving colony of Australia and nation of the British Commonwealth’. She observes that although she was too young to recognise it at the time, the social structure was typical of the way in which ‘whiteness’ hierarchically organises class, gender, race and culture:

“There was the privileged minority of white Australian making lots of money by developing an undeveloped country, living in large comfortable homes and attending endless parties and social engagements. There was the other cultural minority typically present in a colonial society, the Chinese who owned many trading stores selling imported Chinese goods, and of course the native cultural majority who were being ‘civilized’ as part of this colonial settlement. ... Although as children we were part of the ethnic minority, we were certainly the privileged minority and at school our teachers and principals were also part of this group. Any students who were members of the cultural majority were the ones faced with cultural and language difficulties at school”.

Conditions are improving

A few students pointed out that in contrast to their experiences of school (mostly in the 1980s and 1990s) which were still very monocultural, some schools today appear, fortunately, to be

changing. Already mentioned is the Aboriginal interviewee who wished that she could have done some of the interesting work on Aboriginality and culture that her younger sisters are doing in school today. The student who spent part of her childhood in PNG sends her children to the local state school in Yeronga. In her daughter's Year 1 class last year, "there were about a dozen white Australian children, with the remaining dozen made up of a mixture of Aboriginal, Middle-Eastern, Serbian, Ethiopian, Russian and Japanese children. Despite initial language difficulties the teacher drew on all these cultures to teach the children about their world and I feel lucky that my children are able to have such a rich cultural diversity from which to learn."

Student reflections on their learning.

Australia is no different from many societies in which schooling is shaped by contesting discourses of cultural diversity embodying both neo-colonial and decolonising histories. These discourses may be considered sites which lend themselves to interrogation about schooling. In the life history assignment which I set my students, reading about and discussing the discourses of 'whiteness' in relation to the discourses of other ethnicities in society, and in the teaching they had received at school, immediately threw open questions about ideology, education and social relations. A few have acknowledged the importance of teachers, parents and grandparents who inculcated norms which went against the dominant grain of the racism inherent in white supremacist ideologies. Some students felt that their recognition of the un-earned privileges that whiteness had brought to their education was a necessary step in enabling them to see how they could work to structure their own teaching to counter this. These processes of learning were particularly important in encouraging white Australian students to rethink their response to the history and culture of Indigenous Australians. As Student 3 expressed it:

"In this analysis, I have considered how society and the institution of schooling in particular were instrumental in my indoctrination into the mainstream, and have also examined the mechanisms that perpetuate cultural dominance. We are all products of our socialisation, and in Australia, the white middle-class is earmarked for success above the non-white or working class early on. As an educator in the making, it is important to have such an insight into this often unconscious process, in the hope that I might help all students attain personal and academic success in the future".

Students who had travelled outside of Australia appreciated the opportunity given them by their life history analysis to reflect on what the experience meant to them. One student summarised it in this way:

People say travel changes you, and I have always known that my travels to Africa and Asia have contributed heavily to my changing views on Australian society. I have been able, through this analysis, to pinpoint exactly how that has happened, and I can now recognise that it has been through the removal of the curtain of invisibility that I have really been able to see. They say we question that with which we are most familiar; that if you asked a fish to describe water it wouldn't be able to answer. Take that fish out of water and it will learn quickly about the structure that has supported it and given it life. (Student 25).

Students of non-Anglo ethnicities used the life history assignment as an opportunity to explore how they were coming to terms with their own multicultural backgrounds and how they could better relate to the intercultural teaching task. Stuart Hall's (1996b) concept of 'diasporic identities' is important here in helping us to think of these students as being situated in-between different cultures, able to unsettle the assumptions of one culture from the perspective of another. Tsolidis (2001) makes the point that diasporic students may be thought of as living within minority groups which, far from being stranded outposts of a culture, can increasingly contribute to the ways in which global cultural, economic and political production can take advantage of the opportunities of a globalising era.

It is gratifying when students who have done this assignment conclude it by recognising that:

‘It is through the analysis of our own culture that we can start to understand how the process of socialisation has impacted upon us, and moulded our ideals. Once this understanding is achieved, it is possible to start to challenge the beliefs and stereotypes that are perpetuated throughout the media and society’ (Student 26).

The difficulties and complexities in undertaking such a challenge are articulated by Student 27, who closes her essay by reflecting on how ill-prepared she felt for teaching because of her socialization which ignored any issues to do with race, culture or ethnicity:

At my all-girl’s high school, we... continually focused on gender and never on race. Perhaps by not focusing on race or culture we assumed ourselves to be equitable and non-racist; by not [acknowledging] differences, we were acting as though there was no difference. The reality, however, is very different. As a pre-service teacher, I am confronted with students of all ethnicities and because I have been socialized as a white Australian, I am ashamed to say I have no idea how to teach them!... At present I empathize with Brandon’s (2003) point of view and believe that I must confront my white privilege, appreciate social group differences, teach all children as though they were capable of the utmost academic success... include multicultural education in the mainstream curriculum and dispel notions of hierarchy due to race (Student 27).

I am giving the last word to Student 28, whose summary states nicely the kind of insights I hoped this socio-cultural life history analysis would help students achieve:

In concluding, I can say that the major factor shaping my culture and identity has been my educational experiences characterised by the contextual factors of the time (historical period) and space (geographic location) in which I have been raised. By analysing these factors with respect to my own life, I have gained a better understanding of what my culture consists of, and who I am as a result of this culture. It has provided me with a deeper understanding of other cultures, rather than a superficial or tokenistic ideal based on some well-known ethnic traditions. I believe that the notion of assimilation is slowly being replaced with genuine attempts to implement cultural diversity and multiculturalism through changes to educational practices. Thus, education is the vehicle for social change. (Student 28).

Conclusion

The subject *Cultural Diversity and Education* challenges students to examine Australian society by (i) relating its main ethno-cultural discourses to each other – ‘white’, ‘ethnic’ and ‘Indigenous’ and (ii) analysing life histories to illustrate how individuals experience these discourses. I have designed it in this way to reflect my belief that this activity will take student-teachers one small step forward in countering the negative legacies of neo-colonialism’s ‘race’ ideologies. Successfully doing this discourse analysis in relation to self and society, and sharing it with each other (in class, or on a web discussion forum), can lay the foundation for teachers to take further steps in their journey of embracing cultural diversity.

These steps need to include recognizing and honouring (instead of erasing or denying) the central role of Indigenous people in Australian culture, and analyzing how interacting cultures in a multicultural society rework and restructure each other (see Papastergiadis 2000, pp. 188-195). Such understandings should help teachers contribute to initiatives for peace and reconciliation, and practise critically-grounded rather than tokenistic approaches to helping their own students engage with cultural diversity – all essential components of an intercultural pedagogy. Some university teacher educators are contributing to this outcome by expanding intercultural strands in teacher education in Australia and elsewhere (see Hickling-Hudson 2003a). Yet, the literature supports my experience in suggesting that there is a gap between the teaching of equity perspectives in teacher education and its translation to the school

culture (Craft, 1996, Levine-Rasky 2000, Brandon 2003). It is still a matter of concern that the hegemonic structure of many teacher education degree programs falls far short of offering student teachers adequate opportunities to study intercultural perspectives in the depth needed to synthesize them in their practice.

NOTES

1. Teachers are expected to help students develop the goals of multiculturalism. These goals are expressed by the current Australian government as civic duty (the obligation to support the constitution and democratic institutions), cultural respect, social equity, and 'productive diversity', the latter referring to the maximising of the cultural and socio-economic benefits which arise from the diversity of the population (National Multicultural Advisory Council, 1999, pp. 9-10).

2. Another 12 credit point subject, *Indigenous Issues and Education*, is also offered as an elective, therefore the *Cultural Diversity and Education* elective is designed to provide a critical overview of how ethnicities are juxtaposed and how they interact within the social and educational frameworks of Australian society. Indigenous issues are important in this subject, but are not the only focus. Students wishing to study Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in more depth are likely to take, instead of *Cultural Diversity*, the *Indigenous Issues in Education* elective, which is now taught by an Indigenous lecturer. In my view, the themes of such subjects should be interwoven throughout the curriculum instead of being an optional area of study, and students should be asked to undertake in-depth as well as introductory intercultural studies.

3. 'Mabo' is popular shorthand for the 1992 High Court ruling in the case brought by Eddie Mabo for Indigenous land ownership, a ruling which opened the door for native title claims (Reynolds 1996).

4. SBS is the acronym for the 'Special Broadcasting Service' which brings multicultural radio, television and language services to Australians.

Thank you to these and other students who shared their work:

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